

## ON TRACK WITH MDT

An issue concerning public safety has been brought to my attention, and it is of such importance that I want to take a few minutes and discuss it here.

As anyone who drives an authorized emergency vehicle or police car can tell you, drivers often speed by when they are pulled over without reducing speed or pulling over in to the passing lane. This creates a dangerous situation for both vehicles, and the winter conditions we've been experiencing only serve to increase those hazards.

This is such an important issue that the 2001 Legislature took action on this matter. The results of that effort are detailed in MCA 61-8-346:

- (3) Upon approaching a stationary authorized emergency vehicle or police vehicle that is displaying visible signals of flashing or rotating amber, blue, red, or green lights, the operator of the approaching vehicle shall:
  - (a) reduce the vehicle's speed, proceed with caution, and, if possible considering safety and traffic conditions, move to a lane that is not adjacent to the lane in which the authorized emergency vehicle or police vehicle is located or move as far away from the authorized emergency vehicle or police vehicle as possible; or
  - (b) if changing lanes is not possible or is determined to be unsafe, reduce the vehicle's speed, proceed with caution, and maintain a reduced speed, appropriate to the road and the conditions, through the area where the authorized emergency vehicle or police vehicle is stopped.



Emergency vehicle/patrol officer safety is of such concern that the 2001 Legislature enacted MCA 61-8-346. It requires individuals to slow down and move to another lane when approaching a stationary authorized emergency vehicle that has its flashing lights activated.

If you're shaking your head because I'm quoting the Montana Code Annotated, please take a moment to reread the directions it provides. Drivers coming upon a stationary emergency vehicle or police car need to reduce their speed, proceed with caution and, if possible, move to another lane of traffic. If you're wondering why this is so important, envision being stranded out on the interstate shoulder and having a car zip by you at 80 mph as you step out of your vehicle. And I mean zip by so close to you that that they could rip your car door off if you happened to open it at that moment! As you can imagine, this is a highly dangerous predicament and one that our patrol officers, maintenance workers and emergency vehicle personnel find themselves facing on a daily basis. Frankly, that frustrates and angers me, and I want to change it. Unfortunately, I

cannot control how the public drives. I can only ask you to be aware of this and do your part to make the situation safer – and ask I will.

The next time you're traveling and come upon a police car or emergency vehicle on the shoulder of the road, please follow the directions provided above. Slowing down for a few moments might not seem like much, but it could mean the difference between life and death for one of our public servants. With all that they do to protect and serve us, I think this is the least we can do to thank and honor them.

This message is brought to you by both MDT and the Montana Highway Patrol. Thank you for helping us stay "on track," and please drive safely!

Dave Galt  
Director